

THE MEANING OF
TRUTH IN HISTORY

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CREIGHTON LECTURE

**THE MEANING OF
TRUTH IN HISTORY**

BY THE
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THE MEANING OF TRUTH IN HISTORY.

The occasion on which it is my privilege to address you is one which is associated with the name of a remarkable man. He possessed gifts of intellect and of character which would have made him eminent in careers other than the one he chose for himself. But he held tenaciously the principle, adherence to which is essential for a man who genuinely aspires to accomplish anything lasting. He knew that he must concentrate, and he did so. He lived a dedicated life—dedicated to the service of his God and his Church, as he conceived them. Such were his gifts that his work deeply impressed with the sense of its reality those who were permitted to come near him. The impression he made was heightened by his obvious conviction that he could best render the service to which he had consecrated his life by following truth unswervingly, and seeking

as well as he could to extend the province of genuine knowledge. The result of an unfaltering adhesion to this principle was that his writings produced on the public an impression of sincerity and thoroughness, an impression which deepened as time went on. In so far as he devoted his gifts to the study of history, it was therefore natural that his integrity of purpose and his desire for the truth should lead to his becoming known and trusted as an historian of a wide and searching outlook.

It accords with what is fitting that among the memorials erected to him there should have been included this lectureship. To me it has fallen to be the lecturer this year, and to choose a topic that is appropriate. What Bishop Creighton cared for in historical work was, above all, to treat the facts justly, to see things not merely on the side that is external and superficial and therefore transitory, but in their fuller and more enduring significance. It is out of a feeling of respect for this characteristic of his life and writing that I have selected for my subject "The Meaning of Truth in History."

But the subject is full of difficulty. As decade succeeds decade, we in this country are learning more and more, in science, in art, and in religion alike, that the question, "What is Truth?" is a question of far-reaching significance, a significance that seems to reach farther the more we reflect. And the perplexity of the question extends not least to the case of the historian. For it seems to-day that

the genuine historian must be more than a biographer or a recorder. The field of his enquiry cannot be limited by the personality of any single human being, nor can it be occupied by any mere enumeration of details or chronicle of events. A great man, such as Cæsar or Charlemagne, may stand for a period, but his personality is, after all, a feature that is transitory. The spirit of the age is generally greater and more lasting than the spirit of any individual. The spirit of the age is also more than a mere aggregate of the events that a period can display, or than any mere sum of individual wills. What, then, is to be the standard of truth for the historian? The analogy of the artist who paints a portrait may prove not without significance for the answer to this question. The great artist does not put on canvas a simple reproduction of the appearance of his subject at a particular moment; that is the work of the photographer. Art, in the highest sense, has to disentangle the significance of the whole from its details and to reproduce it. The truth of art is a truth that must thus be born again of the artist's mind. No mere narration of details will give the whole that at once dominates these details and yet does not exist apart from them. But art, with its freedom to choose and to reject, selects details and moulds them into a shape that is symbolic of what is at once ideal and real. In art, thought and sense enter into the closest union, or rather they form an entirety within which both

are abstractions from an actual that does not let itself be broken up.

Now the historian surely must resemble the portrait painter rather than the photographer. The secret of the art of a Gibbon or a Mommsen seems to lie in this: that they select their details, select those that are relevant and that can be moulded into a characteristic setting without sacrifice of integrity or accuracy, a setting which is typical of a period. At some point or other we may want to have the details which have been passed by. We may want them for a picture of the period under another aspect. But we do not always want all the details. "Le secret d'ennuyer c'est tout dire." Carlyle passed much by when he wrote his French Revolution, and it is well that he did. We find what he left alone in other historians who present the story from a different standpoint. Just as there may be several portraits, all of superlative excellence, while differing in details and even in their presentation of actual features, so there may be several histories, equal in value, but differing in a similar fashion.

To judge, then, of excellence in the historian we must possess a standard not wholly dissimilar from that by which we judge of excellence in the artist. In the case of the artist, there can be little doubt about one point, at all events, in that standard. Whether it is nature or man that he presents, the image must interpret character. It does not detract

from the truth of the work of the artist that the cottage and the figures in his landscape never existed exactly as he has painted them, or even at all. What is important is that they should suggest the deeper and more enduring meaning of what is actual, in the fullest and most important sense. The expression which the portrait painter has put on canvas may be a rare one—the expression, perhaps of an individuality seized at a unique moment of existence. But all the more does that expression stand out as the truth about the real life of the man whose portrait is there. Now, the historian also is concerned with what is ideal. He is concerned with this just because it is only through the ideal that what has happened can be lifted above the particularity of the events that obscure its meaning. M. Renan has put this point admirably:—

“Il n’y a guère de détails certains en histoire; les détails cependant ont toujours quelque signification. Le talent de l’historien consiste à faire un ensemble vrai avec des traits qui ne sont vrai qu’à demi.” And again:—“L’histoire pure doit construire son édifice avec deux sortes de données, et, si j’ose le dire, deux facteurs; d’abord, l’état général de l’âme humaine en un siècle et dans un pays donnés; en second lieu, les incidents particuliers qui, se combinant avec les causes générales, ont déterminé le cours des événements. Expliquer l’histoire par des incidents est aussi faux que de

l'expliquer par des principes purement philosophiques. Les deux explications doivent se soutenir et se compléter l'une l'autre."¹

The work of the historian and that of the artist seem to be so far analogous. Both are directed to finding the true expression of their subjects. Neither is concerned with accidents of detail that are fortuitous. But the analogy extends only a little way, for the subjects are very different. That of a portrait is, after all, a single and isolated personality. It is the business of the artist to express this personality, and to express it as a work of art in which thought and feeling are blended in a unity that cannot be broken up. But the historian is not concerned with any single personality. His work seems rather to be to display the development of a nation or of a period, and to record accurately, and in the light of the spirit of the nation or period, the sequence of events in which its character has manifested itself. Like the artist, the historian may omit many details. But he does not possess the freedom of the artist. What we ask from the great painter is his interpretation of a personality, and he may take liberties in imagining costume and background. Indeed, he often must take liberties, for the expression counts for more than circumstances which obscure rather than assist in revealing it. But the picture created by the historian, though it, too, can only be created by his genius and must

¹ 'Vie de Jésus', Préface de la treizième édition.

be born of his mind, is of a different order. The presentation of the whole and the description of actual facts are here more closely related. Literal accuracy counts for much, for others than himself will claim the liberty to refer to his book for actual facts, and to interpret them, it may be, differently from his rendering. Thus the historian is under restrictions greater than those of the artist. If he uses as complete a liberty as the artist claims, he is reckoned as belonging to quite a different profession, that of a writer of historical romance, such as the romances of Sir Walter Scott.

But this is not all. The artist depicts as what is characteristic an expression that may have been found only at one moment in the history of his subject. The historian has to present events and their meaning over a period that is often long. Even occurrences that seem isolated, like the execution of Charles I., or the taking of the Bastille, or the Battle of Waterloo, have to be shown as culminating events in a course of development which must be recorded because apart from it they lose their significance. It is only by tracing the genesis not merely of culminating events but of national institutions, and by exhibiting them as the outcome and embodiment of the genius of the people to whom they belong, that in many cases they can be made intelligible. This principle is the foundation of the historical method. It is a principle which to-day seems almost a commonplace, but it has not

always been so. It is striking to observe how really great writers suffer when they violate it. Some extreme instances are to be found among the historians of Jurisprudence. I will take two cases of the kind, and I offer no apology for turning aside for a moment to the highly specialised branch of history from which I take them. For they are admirable examples of the fault in method which I wish to illustrate. Moreover, I am a lawyer whose almost daily duty it is to ascertain the reasons why the law has become what it is, because unless I can do so, I am bound to fail in the interpretation of its scope and authority. There has thus been forced on me direct experience of the embarrassment which the fault of which I am speaking causes. Those who have to consult almost daily otherwise great books dealing with the history of legal institutions encounter this fault in its worst form.

I will refer first to the shortcomings of a really remarkable Englishman. The case of Jeremy Bentham is notable. He ignored the light which history had to throw on the institutions about which he was writing, and his reputation thereby suffered. He rendered great services to the cause of law reform in England and elsewhere by the force of his destructive criticism. The very abstractness of his methods added to the incisiveness of this criticism. But when he describes, and even where he brings an indictment that is obviously true, he is, generally speaking, utterly defective as an his-

torian. His unconsciousness of the genesis of the facts with which he is dealing is extraordinary in a man of such acuteness. He attributes the continued existence of bad laws to the unscrupulousness of contemporary rulers and judges, as if they had individually devised them. When, for example, with admirable insistence, he denounces the existence of the rule which, contrary to what we now regard as plain common-sense, used to prevent a party to a suit from giving evidence in it, he is apparently unconscious of the fact that there was once a stage in the evolution of public opinion at which it was inevitable that the rule should be what it was.¹ While religious opinion dominated in matters secular, it was almost universally held that to allow an interested party to give evidence on his own behalf was to tempt him to perjury, and perjury, which meant everlasting damnation, seemed to our forefathers a more disastrous result than the loss of property. It was, in such a period, quite natural that public opinion should prefer spiritual safety to secular justice, and fashion law accordingly. We have to understand that this was so, if we would understand the history of the rules which restricted the admission of evidence in the Courts of England. That we have now passed to a different standpoint does not lessen the necessity. Bentham again, to

¹ See his remarks on Blackstone and the Judges in his 'Rationale of Judicial Evidence,' Book IX, C. 5 (Vol. 7 of Bowring's Edition of his Works.)

take another example, denounced the Roman law as being a parcel of dissertations badly drawn up! He knew nothing of its history or of the circumstances of its development. He had not heard of the work of the great historical school of Roman law which Savigny was even then leading. His method was always to assume certain abstract principles, and to judge everything in their light without regard to time or place. He insisted on immediate codification, just as Savigny, on the other hand, insisted on the postponement of codes until the common law had completed a full course of natural growth. But Savigny himself, to take my second illustration, at times incurred the perils which are inseparable from occasional lapses into abstractness of mind. Although he was an apostle of the historical method, and, in general, took far more account of history than did Bentham, he, too, at moments, made what to a later generation have become mistakes. For example, he attacked the code which Napoleon had enacted for France. He attacked it on the ground that to enact such a code was unscientific.¹ He was probably right in desiring that the spirit of the great Roman lawyers should continue, at least for a time, to work throughout Germany, where it held sway, unobstructed by the rules of a rigid code. In that country, where

¹ See the section headed 'Die drei neuen Gesetzbücher,' in his book 'Vom Beruf unsrer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft.'

the tradition of the Roman law actually occupied the field, the provisions of a code might well have proved not only unduly rigid, but also artificial. Yet his attack on Napoleon's great Code did not do justice to the overwhelming reasons for enacting it in France. France, unlike Germany, had, before Napoleon's time, no general body of laws. The different parts of the country were subject to utterly divergent systems, such as were the Customs of Paris and of Normandy. It was remarked by Voltaire that a man travelling in France in his own time changed laws as often as he changed horses. The rough common-sense of Napoleon saw that a general code was a necessity. He framed one that was not ideal, judged by the high standards of Savigny, but it was the best he could frame at a time when nothing was to be hoped for in the way of development on the basis of the prevailing laws. Gradual reform of this kind might well have been possible had the Roman law been the general foundation of a single system of jurisprudence in France. But it was not so, and Napoleon therefore took the course which the necessities of the time dictated.

I have cited these examples of the desirability of the historical spirit in estimating legal institutions, partly because they illustrate admirably the truth of the saying of Balduinus, a great jurist of the sixteenth century, "*Sine historia caecam esse jurisprudentiam.*" But I have cited them also because

they illustrate the wider proposition that no event in history of any kind can be judged without full knowledge of its context and of the spirit of its particular age. The execution of Charles I. has been the subject of the hottest controversy. Did the tribunal which decreed it sit wholly without constitutional warrant, and was the trial conducted quite illegally? Probably both questions must be answered affirmatively from the standpoint of the common law. But this does not conclude the discussion. It is true that acts of the kind—that is, revolutionary acts—are outside the provisions of ordinary law. And yet they may be justified under what is called martial law, but is, in our country, only an application of the maxim, “*Salus populi suprema lex.*” Had Cromwell not put Charles to death, it was more than merely possible that Charles would have seized the first chance of putting Cromwell himself to death and of upsetting the new order of government. As Lord Morley, in his “*Life of Cromwell*,” has pointed out, the real justification of Cromwell must depend on the question whether what can only be justified as an act of war, was or was not a public necessity. And the answer to this question requires that the problem should be approached as a large one, and in the spirit which demands a survey of the events of the periods both before and after the year 1649. The judgment of posterity upon the act of Oliver Cromwell must turn, not on what he was as an individual, but on

the extent to which he was the representative figure in a movement which must be judged before he can be approved or condemned.

Now it is just this obligation of the historian that makes his work so difficult. Like the portrait painter, he has, in his search after expression, to select details, but he has to select them under far more stringent conditions as to completeness and accuracy. Exact these details must be, but complete they cannot be. Much must be rejected as irrelevant. The test of relevancy is the standard of what is necessary, not merely for exactness, but for the adequate portraiture of the spirit of the time. And this test necessitates great insight into the characteristics of that spirit. Otherwise misleading details will be selected, and undue prominences and proportions will be assigned. The historian must be able to estimate what are the true and large characteristics of the age, and one test of his success will be, as in the case of the artist, the test of his stature. Can he rise high enough to present the truth in what, almost as it were by direct perception, we seem to recognise as a great form of deep significance? I say almost by direct perception, for the analogy of the intuition of art and literature appears to come in here. One recognises the quality of size in a Gibbon or a Carlyle, as one recognises it in the great portrait painter and the great dramatic poet. But in the domain of history the predominance of this quality is conditioned by the imperative duty to

be accurate to an extent that is incumbent neither on the painter nor on the poet. The historian who has a whole period to describe must be more than exact; he has to be lord over his details. He must marshal these details and tower above them, and reject and select in the light of nothing less than the whole. He must not let his view of that whole, as has been the case with both a Bossuet, on the one hand, and a Buckle, on the other, be distorted by *a priori* conceptions that are abstract and inadequate to the riches of the facts of life. He must frame his estimate after a study of the whole sequence of events, of those events which throw light on the conduct and characteristics of a nation in the variety of phases in its existence. It is just here that he is apt to be beset by obsessions that come from unconscious pre-judgments.

I wish to try to say something about the origin of this kind of temptation to pre-judgment—a temptation to which a long list of historians have succumbed in a greater or less degree. Indeed, no one can wholly escape it. But it has various forms, some of which are worse than others. In those that are most misleading it seems to arise from an insufficiently considered application of the conceptions under which the observer searches after facts, conceptions which are often too narrow for the facts themselves. It appears as exactly the same kind of temptation as that into which in various forms students of the exact sciences have been prone to

fall. I will therefore ask you to bear with me while I touch on the general subject of scientific method. For in every department of science just the same difficulty arises as arises in that of the historian, and the source of these difficulties in some branches of science can be easily traced. Facts are apt to be distorted in the mind of the observer by preconceived hypotheses of which he is hardly conscious. The attempts which have been made to exhibit the life of an organism as the result of physical forces operating from without on an aggregate of minute mechanisms or chemical compounds, have, notwithstanding their usefulness from the point of view of physics and chemistry, fallen short as regards the nature of life itself. When we are confronted with the unquestionable facts of reproduction and heredity, these attempts have always broken down. We are driven to admit, not the existence of a special vital force controlling development from without, but the conception of something in the nature of an end realising itself, a whole which exists only in what it controls, but which, while it may still fall far short of conscious purpose, is not on that account less real. We may, indeed, dislike expressions which suggest abstract or even conscious purpose, and prefer, with the author of that remarkable book, "Creative Evolution," to speak of what is realised as a tendency rather than an end. But one thing is clear, however we may express ourselves. We must not let the terror of theology and

the supernatural, which often afflicts men of science with fears, deflect us from our duty to be true in our descriptions to actual experience, and drive us by way of reaction into purely mechanistic theories which are inadequate to explain it. The history of biology seems to have been at times as sad an illustration of the dangers of anti-theological dogmas as it has at other periods been of the dangers of those of a theological teleology.

In the same way, if we would know the truth about men and affairs, we must learn to study their history quite simply and with minds as free as we can make them from prejudice. Our preconceptions generally arise from our having unconsciously become metaphysicians. We do not need to be metaphysicians at all, except to the modest extent of knowing how to guard against falling without being aware of it into bad metaphysics. Unconscious prejudice is apt to tempt us to deny the reality of much of the world as it seems, and seek to stretch that world on the rack of some special principle of very limited application. The only way of safety is to train the mind to be on the watch for the intrusion of limited and exclusive ideas. If to yield to such intrusion is dangerous in the field of biology, the danger becomes still more apparent when we are confronted with the phenomena which belong to the region of human existence. We can neither deny the reality of the moral and intellectual atmosphere in which, as persons, we live and move and

have our being, nor resolve it into the constructions which represent the utmost limits attainable by the mathematical and physical sciences. Of all that really lives, Goethe's well-known criticism appears to be true :—

“Wer will was Lebendig's erkennen und beschreiben
Sucht erst den Geist heraus zu treiben,
Dan hat er die Theile in seiner Hand,
Fehlt leider nur das geistige Band.”

In point of fact, the warning which Goethe gave to the biologist of his time is not less important for the student of history. The latter, also, must refuse the injunctions to limit his outlook which come from the materialist, and he must refuse not less sternly the counter-materialism of those who would seek in the events of the world only for the interference and mechanical guidance of a Power operating from without. He must recognise, too, the reality of social wholes, outside of which individuals cannot live—social wholes which are actual just in so far as the individuals who compose them in some measure think and will identically. For, apart from his social surroundings, the individual appears to have no adequate life. Such social wholes cannot be satisfactorily described in biological language. The practice of attempting to so express them is a very common one. People talk of social organisms and their development by means of natural selection. But in speaking of the organisation of society and of its development, we have passed into a region

where the categories of biology are not adequate. In this region we only darken counsel by using phrases drawn from the vocabulary of a branch of knowledge that does not take account of conscious purpose and of the intelligence and volition which are characteristic of persons as distinguished from organisms. No doubt human beings are organisms. But they are also much more than organisms. The biological method in history and sociology is therefore unsatisfactory. It may be, and sometimes must be used, just as are the methods of physics and chemistry in biology itself. But its application ought always to be a restricted and guarded one, because, if the application is made uncritically, the reality of much that is actual in present and past alike will inevitably be ignored. Darwinian methods and conceptions avail here only to a very limited extent. For the social wholes with which history has to deal are conscious wholes representing intelligence and volition.

And this is why the historian is not only at liberty, but is bound to recognise in the spirit of an age something of which he can legitimately take account. It is also the reason why he can never be a mere recorder, and why he must always be a man of Art as well as of Science. For Art alone can adequately make the idea of the whole shine forth in the particulars in which it is immanent, and this is as true of the history of a period as it is of a moment in the life of a man.

In saying these things, I am far from suggesting that the historian should become a student of philosophy with a view to having a standpoint of his own. I have touched on the topic for a directly contrary purpose. I am anxious that he should not unconsciously commit the fault of a Bossuet or a Bentham or a Buckle by slipping into a philosophical attitude without knowing it. It may well be that he cannot avoid placing himself at some particular standpoint for the purposes of his review. Most historians seem to me to do so to a greater or less degree. What I am concerned about is simply to make it plain that the choice of such a standpoint is no easy matter, or one that a man dare lightly adventure. And I have said what I have, simply for the purpose of laying emphasis on the need, in making such a choice, of knowledge of the alternatives and consciousness of the magnitude of the field of controversy. The historian has to approach the records of the experience of nations with a mind sufficiently open to enable him to attach weight to every phase of that experience. His conception of it must be sufficiently wide to enable him to take account of every aspect which he may encounter. He must exclude neither rationality nor irrationality. Now, if experience thus conceived be the material on which the historian has to operate, his method must not be either to search for and record isolated facts which can never really be interpreted apart from their context, or to set out abstract principles.

The very width of his field of research must necessitate the selection of his facts and their relation to each other and to the particular system in which alone they have their meaning. For meaning is the foundation of system in history. The sense of this, and the extraordinary difficulty which the historian has in determining what is relevant and what is not relevant to a true interpretation, has caused some critics to despair of history, and others to try to confine its task in a fashion which, if strictly carried out, would deprive the historian of the chance of calling to his aid the method of the artist. It is interesting to observe to what lengths these two divergent tendencies have been carried.

I will refer first to the criticism which rejects the possibility of reliable history altogether. In his "Farbenlehre," Goethe makes an observation on the value of exact records. "We are told," he says, "to look to the spirit rather than to the letter. Usually, however, the spirit has destroyed the letter, or has so altered it that nothing remains of its original character and significance." He puts the same thought in another fashion when he makes Faust say to Wagner, in an often-quoted passage :—

"Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit,
Sind uns ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln ;
Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,
Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln."

This seems a highly sceptical utterance. The historian is told that he can succeed neither in

recovering the spirit of the past, nor in discovering its letter. And if the historian were faced with the dilemma Goethe puts to him, his case would indeed be a difficult one. But is it so? Let us look at the case of records. Goethe was no doubt right in his scepticism about mere records. For if a man indulges himself with the belief that in quoting records accurately he is collecting the truth about the history of a period, he is indulging himself rashly. What do such records consist of? Biographies written at the time, letters, and State papers are their main forms. As to the biographies, they are often valuable as presenting a fine portrait of their subject; and the narrative and the correspondence quoted are, of course, of much use. But they are almost invariably coloured. The selection of material is necessarily dependent on the object with which the selection is made, and that is the biography of one man. You have only to read another biography, that of his political rival, in order, if they were both famous men, to realise that whatever value the story possesses as portraiture, it is by no means to be relied on implicitly for a scientific record of the facts. Lord Morley, in his "Notes on Politics and History," quotes Bismarck on this point. Reading a book of superior calibre, that remarkable man once came, so Lord Morley tells us, on a portrait of an eminent personage whom he had known well. "Such a man as is described here," he cried, "never existed. It is not in diplo-

matic materials, but in their life of every day that you come to know men." So, remarks Lord Morley, does a singularly good judge warn us of the perils of archival research.

As to isolated letters, there again colour is inevitably present. The writers, however intimately acquainted with the facts, are too near to see them in their proper perspective. From their correspondence many fragments of solid and useful fact may be extracted; but the bulk of what is there is, taken by itself, unreliable material for the historian. It is only by careful selection from a variety of sources, and by recasting—that is, by following the method of Art rather than that of Science—that he can produce the true expression of the period as a living whole.

State papers, again, are written by Ministers, or by diplomatists, or, more often, by their officials under somewhat loose inspiration. They embody the view of the moment. Their value is mainly a passing one. They may contain documents of more than passing value, treaties or agreements or plans which have subsequently been translated into action. But as material out of which a scientific and lasting account of the facts can be reconstructed, they suffer from inevitable because inherent defects. Ambassadors' letters and the letters written to them are documents in which the impressions of the moment are recorded, impressions which are very often evanescent. Such documents are, from the cir-

cumstances in which they are composed, almost always fragmentary and incomplete. In public life the point of view is constantly changing. If a hundred years after this an historian, desiring to describe the relations between Great Britain and Germany, or between the former country and France, in the commencement of the twentieth century, were to confine himself to the State papers of particular years, he would be misled. He would see little to explain the rapid evolution and change that had taken place within a very brief period. Nor could he ever discover the traces of almost imperceptible and rarely recorded influences and incidents which had stimulated the development. This is true of the evolution of policy at home as well as abroad. Speaking with some knowledge of what has gone on from day to day during the last eight years of the public life of this country, my experience has impressed me with a strong feeling that to try to reconstruct the story from State papers or newspaper accounts or letters or biographical sources would be at present, and must for some time remain, a hopeless attempt. And I know from my conversations with men of still longer and greater experience that they hold this view as strongly as I do. The materials so afforded must be used at a later period by a man who possesses the gifts requisite for presenting the narrative as that of an organic whole, and that organic whole must in its expression be born afresh in his mind. So only will he present a picture

of what actually happened in a period of history. The historian will fail hopelessly if he seeks to be a mere recorder. For the truth about the whole, the expression of which is what matters, was not realised in its completeness until time and the working of the spirit of the period had enabled the process developed in a succession of particular events to be completed. It is a mistake to suppose that statesmen are always conscious of the ends which they are accomplishing. It is not by the piecing together of mechanical fragments, but by a process more akin to the development of life, that societies grow and are changed.

There is thus, if I am right, an inevitable element of what seems at first sight to be unreality in even the best work of historians. But this need not discourage us if our notion of reality, and therefore of our standard of truth, is something more than the mere correspondence of isolated images and facts. If the test of truth in history must be the presentation of an expression, true at least in the sense in which we use the word about a great portrait, then the recording of the chance fragments of isolated facts which alone have survived for us is quite inadequate to the fulfilment of the test. All the historian writes ought to be true in the sense of being a faithful and accurate account of what has happened. But that does not mean that he should record every detail of what has happened. If he tries to do this he will lose both his real subject and himself. His business

is to select in the light of a larger conception of the truth. He must look at his period as a whole and in the completeness of its development. And this is a task rather of the spirit than of the letter. Those who furnish him with the materials have not, and cannot have, the insight which is requisite for him, if he is to be a great historian of reality. And yet, of course, their work, if it is well done, is indispensable. It is indispensable, only it is not history until it has been re-fashioned in the mind of the historian. When a really competent historian has done this we may fairly think, Goethe's scepticism notwithstanding, that real history is possible, inasmuch as we see before us the picture of the spirit of the past.

I now turn to a second form of criticism, that which would reject as inadmissible the intrusion of art into the domain of history. Two well-known authorities on its study, M. Langlois and M. Scignobos, some fifteen years ago published a joint book for the purpose of warning their students at the Sorbonne what the study of history ought not to be. It was in effect an essay on the method of the historical sciences. It is interesting to observe the result at which they arrived, for this result shows the difficulties into which anyone is bound to get who adopts their conception of the subject. Broadly stated, their conclusion is, that while up to about the middle of last century history continued to be treated as a branch of literature, a change has now taken

place, and scientific forms of historical exposition have been evolved and settled, based on the general principle that the aim of history must be, not to arouse the emotions or to give moral guidance, but to impart knowledge pure and simple. They admit that for many form still counts before matter, and that consequently a Macaulay or a Michelet or a Carlyle continues to be read, although he is no longer on a level with current knowledge. But such writing is not, according to them, history proper. What is justified in the case of a work of art is not justified in a work of science. And the methods of the older historians cannot, they therefore hold, now be justified. Thus, they say, Thucydides and Livy wrote to preserve the memory and propagate the knowledge of glorious deeds or of important events, and Polybius and Plutarch wrote to instruct and give recipes for action. Political incidents, wars, and revolutions were in this fashion the main theme of ancient history. Even in our own time they think that the German historians have adopted the old rejected habits. Mommsen and Curtius they instance as authors whose desire to make a strong impression has led them to a certain relaxation of scientific vigour. Speaking for myself, I should not have been surprised had they, on the assumption that their severe standard is to be adopted, put Treitschke in particular into the pillory, for he was a very great offender against their precepts. According to them, history ought to be in the main a science and not

an art. It is only indirectly that it should possess practical utility. Its main object should be accuracy in recording. It consists only, so they say, in the utilisation of documents, and chance therefore predominates in the formation of history, because it is a matter of chance whether documents are preserved or lost. But they admit that the work of the historian cannot be limited by the bare documentary facts which he collects himself. To an even greater degree than other men of science he works with material which is to a large extent collected by others. These may have been men who devoted their energies to the task of search and collection, whose work has merely been what is called "heuristic." Or they may have been previous historians. The point is that, as the knowledge of the historian is only partially derived from his own direct research, his science is one of inference rather than of observation.

It is a corollary from the view of truth in history which I have just been quoting that it should reject, not merely all efforts to look for the hand of Providence as the interpretation of human development, but also the attempts which have been made in philosophies of history to see in it the evolution of forms of mind. Bossuet and Hegel come alike under condemnation. "On ne s'arrête plus guère aujourd'hui à discuter," says M. Seignobos, "sous la forme théologique la théorie de la Providence dans l'histoire. Mais la tendance à expliquer les

faits historiques par les causes transcendantes persiste dans des théories plus modernes, où la métaphysique se déguise sous des formes scientifiques.”

Now there is no doubt much to be said for the resolute spirit in which the two professors of the Sorbonne set themselves to eliminate all prejudices and theories and methods which can distract from impartiality and exactness of description. But their own admissions, as I have just quoted them, about deficiency in material, and the impossibility of history being a science of pure observation as distinguished from inference, deprive their protest of a good deal of its value. Without going as far as Goethe went in his scepticism about records, it is plain that the business of selection must bulk largely in every historical undertaking. And that is why, while rules as to historical evidence such as the two authors lay down are of use and should be adhered to wherever it is possible, the historian who confined himself within what alone these rules allow would produce little or nothing. The necessity of artistic selection from materials which are admittedly imperfect, not to speak of the personal equation of the writer, would make a history founded on merely scientific methods a mockery. History belongs to the region of art at least as much as it does to that of science, and this is why, *pace* M. Seignobos, we shall continue to delight in Michelet and Macaulay and Carlyle, and to insist on regarding their books as among the world's most valuable records. They

are presentations by great artists of the spirit of a period, and the artists are great because with the power of genius they have drawn portraits which we recognise as resembling the results of direct perception. Genius has been called the capacity for taking pains that is infinite, and these men have taken immeasurable pains and have been inspired by a passion for truth according to their lights. Of course, they have selected and refashioned the materials which through close research were first collected, as great artists always must. Doubtless, too, there are aspects which they have left out or left over for presentation by other artists. But portraits may, as we have seen, vary in expression and yet be true, for the characteristic of what is alive and intelligent and spiritual is that it may have many expressions, all of which are true. With what is inert and mechanical, it is for certain purposes different, but what is inert and mechanical is the subject neither of the artist nor the historian. It is because they let themselves go in bringing out the expression of life and personality that we continue to cling to Gibbon and Mommsen. Their problem is to display before us the course of the lives of men and of nations. Men and nations cannot be estimated through the medium of the balance and the measuring-rod alone, nor are these the most important instruments for estimating them. The phenomena which belong to the region of the spirit can be interpreted only through the medium of the

spirit itself. We cannot interpret by mechanical methods a play of Shakespeare or a sonata of Beethoven. In the regions of life and personality the interpretation must come through life and personality, and the mind recognises the truth of their interpretation when it recognises in it what accords with its own highest phases. History is not mere imagination. It must always rest on a severely-proved basis of fact. But no mere severity of proof will give the historian even this basis. The judgment of truth implies a yet higher standard of completeness and perfection.

I am therefore unable to agree with those who think that history must be either exclusively a science or exclusively an art. It is a science to the extent to which what are commonly known as scientific methods are requisite for accuracy and proper proportion in the details used in the presentation. But the presentation must always be largely that of an artist in whose mind it is endowed with life and form. Truth in history requires, in order to be truth in its completeness, that the mind of the reader should find itself satisfied by that harmony and sense of inevitableness which only a work of art can give. Abstractness of detail and absence of coherence offend this sense of harmony, and so offend against truth by incompleteness of presentation. The reader feels that the facts must have appeared, at the period in which they did really appear, in a fashion quite different. Unless the

history which he reads gives him something of a direct sense of the presence of the actual, his assent will be at the most what Cardinal Newman called notional as distinguished from real. To define the meaning of truth in history thus becomes a problem that is difficult, because it is complex. But this at least seems clear, that some notions about this meaning that have been current in days gone by, and are still current, ought to be reconsidered. A clear conception of first principles is essential in most things, and not least in the writing of history. If I have succeeded in rendering plain to you the reasons which make me feel this need strongly, I shall have accomplished all that I ventured to hope for on the present occasion.

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